

ALL CHRISTIAN'S FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

IMMITATING THE LEADERSHIP OF NEHEMIAH -2

Nehemiah raised the morale of his colleagues, an important part of any leader's work. He built up their faith by redirecting focus away from "the impossible" toward the greatness of God. Throughout the record are such assurances as "the God of heaven will give us success" (2:20) and "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (8:10). Faith builds faith. Tendency to think of the bad part of a situation rather than the good part dismantles faith. The spiritual leader's primary task is to build the faith of others.

Nehemiah encouraged others generously. When he arrived, the people were discouraged and demoralised. First he kindled hope by testifying to the vision and providence of God, and then he secured their co-operation. "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, 'Let us start building.' So they began this good work" (2:18). **Faults and failures must be corrected, but method makes all the difference.** Nehemiah could point to people shortcomings and find hope for a better day. Then his faith and great personal discipline won their confidence and established his authority.

Nehemiah promptly faced potential weaknesses in the plan. Two cases illustrate. The people were discouraged and tired. Opponents were making life miserable (4:10-18). Garbage was piling up and hampering progress. Nehemiah first directed their vision to God, then put them under arms and deployed them at strategic points. He harnessed the strength of the family unit, ordering half a family to work while the other half stood guard and rested. The people recovered their courage as Nehemiah solved real problems through decisive action.

In the second instance the people were disillusioned by the greed of their own rich brothers (5:1-15). Most people lived on mortgaged land; some fathers sold their children as slaves to meet expenses. "Neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards" (v.5). What an awkward mess: children of "have nots" victims of an economy where wealth was held in the hands of a few, and those few were not about to release their grasp.

Nehemiah listened to their stories and sympathised with their suffering. He rebuked the nobles for their heartless situation (5:7) and appealed for immediate relief (v.11). So effective was his negotiation that the reply of the nobles was simply, “We will do as you say” (v. 12). He recovered the authority of the Word of God in the lives of the people (8:1-8). The reforms he instituted would have been short-lived or even impossible apart from that. **He restored the Feast of Tabernacles, which had not been observed since Joshua’s day. He led the people to repentance through the reading of the law (9:3-5). He purified the temple of pagan influence (13:4-9). He encouraged tithing, established Sabbath rest, forbade intermarriage with pagan foreigners, and son recovered the special identity of Israel as God’s chosen people.**

Nehemiah could organise projects and people. Before making detailed plans he conducted a careful survey of the situation (2:11-16). He made a detailed assessment of the personnel available. He did not neglect unglamorous paperwork. He then established key objectives, assigned those to responsible leaders (reliable men of faith), and set them to work (7:1-3). He gave adequate recognition to subordinate leaders, mentioning them by name and the place where each worked (3:1-32). They were given a sense that they were more than mere cogs in a machine. He practised a wise delegation of responsibility. “I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hananiah the commander of the citadel” (7:2). **He had high standards for the subordinates whom he chose, selecting Hananiah, for example, “because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do.” All of this opened the leadership potential of others.**

Nehemiah faced up to opposition and rebellion without forcing a violent confrontation. He carefully took care of intimidation and rebellious situation. He walked through it with his head high and his eyes wide open, with much prayer (4:9). **When he could, he simply ignored the adversary, but always he took precaution (v. 16). Never did he allow policy opposition to deflect his energy from the central task.** Always he kept faith in God (v. 20). The test of spiritual leadership is the achievement of its objective. In Nehemiah’s case, the record is clear:

“So the wall was completed” (6:15).